

*A Hundred Years of an Unvanquished Canon:
F. R. Kreutzwald's Kalevipoeg in Estonian Literary
Histories and School Text-Books*

A hundred years would be a small segment of time for any major tradition of world literature, but in the case of Estonian literature it means almost its entire history. Literature created in the vernacular Estonian language by the Estonians themselves does not go back much farther than the start of the 19th century, when Kristian Jaak Peterson (1901–1922), inspired by ancient Greek poetry, but also by some German authors (perhaps F. G. Klopstock, in the first place), wrote first Estonian poems which have aesthetical value.

However, at that time Estonia as a nation did not exist as yet. It gradually started to take shape from the middle of the 19th century – when Peterson was long ago dead – in the process of the so-called national awakening. It coincided with the creation and publication by Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–1882) of an epic in twenty songs, *Kalevipoeg* (The Son of Kalev, 1861), a major work which gradually acquired the fame of a “national Estonian epic”. Already in his lifetime Kreutzwald became to be honoured as the “father of the song” and the founder of Estonian literature.

A literary canon of a small nation, like the Estonians, whose number has not been much greater than a million people, is very much determined by the linguistic factor. The canon is established almost exclusively from “inside”, i. e. from within national culture. Foreign scholars, critics, intellectuals and general international public do not have access to it. It means a substantial difference as compared with literary canons established in major Western languages. Suffice to mention the fact that the basic canon of Western literature was first and foremost established by philosophically

minded German romantic writers and intellectuals – Herder, Goethe, the Schlegel brothers and others – from “outside” or “border”.

More than often in the history a vision from “outside” or “border” has been indispensable in distinguishing the peculiar individual quality and importance of a literary or artistic work. Translations of a literary work into other languages are part of the “outside” or “border” vision. Speaking of the importance of a work, literary histories usually do not fail to mention that the work has been translated into such and such languages. The language into which a work is translated, may have strong ideological connotations. It is especially true of literary histories elaborated in totalitarian states. Thus a year after Stalin’s death the authors of an Estonian school textbook (for 7th form) claimed that while *Kalevipoeg* had been translated into a number of languages, “the translated edition in Russian (1950) is the best of all”.¹ (Sõgel, Taev 1954: 40)

Setting up a canon from the “exterior border”

In the case of Kreutzwald’s *Kalevipoeg* it was impossible to establish it in Estonian literature from “inside”, because Estonian national literature and culture did not exist at the time when *Kalevipoeg* was published. The intellectual sphere in Estonia was still strongly in the hands of the Baltic-Germans who had ruled the country since the late Middle Ages. The German language prevailed in learned circles. The German role was at the same time ambiguous. On the one hand some alert Baltic-Germans, like for instance Georg Julius Schultz-Bertram (1808–1875) were enthusiastic about vernacular Estonian folklore and trying to revive ancient popular myths. It was, in fact, Schulz-Bertram’s idea that learned Estonians should create their national epic, based on old legends, and stir up national sentiment. (Annist 2005: 428–436)

On the other hand, times had changed. The scientific turn had started. When Kreutzwald, after taking over the task from his friend

¹ Here and in the following quotations from works in Estonian translation is mine. *J. T.*

Friedrich Robert Faehlmann (1798–1850) indeed managed to make the epic *Kalevipoeg* reality and it was published in the *Verhandlungen der Gelehrten Estnischen Gesellschaft* (1857–1861), Schultz-Bertram and other Baltic-Germans started to criticize it on the basis that Kreutzwald's epic was too modern, not authentically folkloric. (Ib. 525–526, 533–534)

While the “inside” Estonian cultural vision did not exist as yet, the immediate Baltic-German “interior border” view did not prove to be sufficient either. More distance was needed. Support for Kreutzwald came from “outside” Estonia, or to be more exact, from the “exterior border”: first, from the capital of the Tsarist Empire, St. Petersburg, and, secondly, from the more liberalized periphery, Finland (which too was part of the tsarist Russia, but unlike Estonia enjoyed a considerable autonomy). By the time of writing his epic, Kreutzwald had established contacts with several members of St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences (Nirk 1966: 78–86). Among the St. Petersburg academicians, especially helpful were Ferdinand Johann Wiedemann, who in the 1860s visited Kreutzwald repeatedly in Võru (a provincial South-Estonian small town, where Kreutzwald worked for forty years as a medical doctor) and Franz Anton Schiefner, who was born in Reval (Tallinn) in a German-speaking family, but became known as a Russian linguist and tibetologist. These men were by no means just “outsiders”, as regards Estonia. Wiedemann was born in Haapsalu, Estonia, in a German-Swedish family and his chef-d'oeuvre is *Ehstnisch-deutsches Wörterbuch* (1869), a major source of older Estonian language for modern times. Schiefner provided Kreutzwald contacts with Finnish literary men and arranged the printing of *Kalevipoeg* in Kuopio, Finland, where censorship was milder than in Estonia, in 1862. Even before the publication of the epic in Finland, in 1859, Sven Gabriel Elmgren, a Finnish librarian and intellectual, pronounced in Helsinki a speech in praise of Kreutzwald's *Kalevipoeg*, considering it equal to Lönnrot's *Kalevala* (Annist 2005: 533–534).

Perhaps the most important fact in making *Kalevipoeg* visible from the “exterior order” was that Wiedemann and Schiefner wrote a review on *Kalevipoeg*, on the basis of which Kreutzwald was awarded the Demidov prize of St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences

even before the epic was finished (!), in 1860. In their review, Wiedemann and Schiefner claimed that Kreutzwald had offered to his people a capital work comparable to *Iliade* given by Homer to the Greek. (Metste, Laak 2003: 31)

Another weighty factor in establishing *Kalevipoeg*'s as the great founding work of Estonian literature was that the work published in *Verhandlungen der Gelehrten Estnischen Gesellschaft* had a parallel translation in German, by Carl Reinthal. (The last five tales were translated by Kreutzwald himself, with the help of Schultz-Bertram). Thus, from the very beginning, *Kalevipoeg* was a "border-work" in the sense that at least to some extent it was accessible to the outside. In 1881 a new German translation, this time by Ferdinand Löwe, appeared in *Verhandlungen der Gelehrten Estnischen Gesellschaft*.

After that pioneering activity in the "exterior border", Kreutzwald's epic gradually became recognized also in Estonia itself, in the autochthonous community, or "inside". Several leading personalities of the "national awakening" (in the 1860s and 1870s), above all Carl Robert Jakobson, found in *Kalevipoeg* a major source for stirring up and expanding national-patriotic sentiment, in opposition to the Baltic-German nobility which had ruled in Estonia for centuries. It is also an important fact in 1875 *Kalevipoeg* was published in Estonian in a popular edition, accessible to the wider public much more than the previous two editions. As August Annist mentions, the men of "national awakening" like Jakobson, Juhan Kurrik (who in a work in 1886 compared *Kalevipoeg* with the German *Nibelungenlied*) and Juhan Kunder (who after Kreutzwald's death published a prose adaptation of *Kalevipoeg*, 1885), idealized *Kalevipoeg* (Annist 2005: 37). They believed that it contained authentic folksongs, thus complying with all requisites, inherited from romanticism, of an ideal folk-epic. Annist adds that even Kreutzwald himself could not shake the belief or myth, once it had been put into circulation. (Ib.)

The nationally minded Estonian clergymen who were in direct contact with peasants, had a deep respect for *Kalevipoeg*. It is well summarized in a longer treatise about Kreutzwald by Villem Reiman, published in 1907 (reprinted in Reimann 2008). Reiman, an enlightened pastor and humanist, claimed: "With his *Kalevipoeg*, Kreutzwald has laid the foundation of Estonian self-conscience;

words taken from folksong have melted together with the writer's own utterance and heart... [---] In the same way as Homer's songs awakened the Greek people, Kreutzwald in his *Kalevipoeg* gave birth to the Estonian nation." (Ib. 81).

In an early history of Estonian literature, *Eesti kirjanduse ajalugu esimesest algusest meie ajani* ('A History of Estonian Literature from the Beginnings till Our Time'), written by Karl August Herman, a linguist, journalist and composer, the author asserted in the chapter on Kreutzwald that the creator of *Kalevipoeg* "had invented nothing from his own head, but had relied in everything on folkloric material" (Herman 1898: 394).

Kalevipoeg between science and fatherland

The "scientific turn" reached Estonia only a little later. It coincided with the emergence of the "Young Estonia" (Noor-Eesti) movement in Estonian literature. In the introductory essay of its first almanac (*Noor-Eesti I Album*, Jurjev, 1905), Gustav Suits claimed that the main goals of the movement were science and love to the fatherland. A number of those young men comprising the movement indeed became quite rapidly Estonia's leading intellectuals and writers. Turning their back to the German heritage, they looked to France as an ideal cultural pattern, being inspired especially by symbolism. In parallel, it developed under the philosophic influence of positivism. However, as Estonian conscious culture was just in a budding shape and also the Estonian language was still in a very rough and hesitant state, it was also the time of establishing rules in the vein of neo-classicism.

In this background, some leading Young Estonians, especially the writers Friedebert Tuglas and Villem Grünthal, as well as the linguist, a great renovator of the Estonian language, Johannes Aavik, became increasingly hostile to Kreutzwald's *Kalevipoeg*, not only reproaching its author for the lack of authenticity in the epic's folkloric basis, but also for all kinds of stylistic, metrical and linguistic failures. (Annist 2005: 40–42). Also in more recent times, the point of view of Tuglas and Aavik has been shared by some of Estonia's

renowned folklorists (Talvet 2009). Even though the radicalism of Tuglas and Aavik was attacked and ridiculed in its turn by some contemporary intellectuals, like Juhan Luiga (1995: reprint of his article published in 1917) it is likely that Tuglas's growing intellectual authority would have prevailed longer had not a split occurred among the Young Estonians themselves.

The split is between science and the fatherland. It is not at all an insignificant fact that the inaugural Young Estonia's almanac (1905) had a portrait of Kreutzwald (by H. Laipmann = Ants Laikmaa) on its opening page. While Tuglas soon after it started to be harshly critical of Kreutzwald's *Kalevipoeg*, the other key figure of Young Estonia, Gustav Suits, instead of joining Tuglas in his criticism, from the start of the 1930s took up researching in a great detail Kreutzwald's life. He first published the fruits of his research in the journal *Looming* (9/1931, 4, 6, 7–8/1933, 5, 9/1934). After the war, in exile, Suits published a monograph in Finnish, *Nuori Kreutzwald* (Young Kreutzwald, Helsinki 1953), which later was adapted into Estonian (*Noor Kreutzwald*, Lund, 1983; Tallinn 1984). In fact, his monograph on Kreutzwald was among the weightiest contributions to the research of Estonian literature. There could have been a hidden rivalry between Tuglas and Suits within Young Estonia and later as Tuglas's prestige and authority grew rapidly and considerably after his two monographs on Juhan Liiv (1914, 1927), supported by two important anthologies of Liiv's poetry (1919, 1926). Suits might have aspired to do something similar with Kreutzwald. Yet he was at that task slower and less skilful than Tuglas. While Tuglas became well-known by his strongly biased and eloquently expressed personal opinions, Suits tried to follow a kind of positivist neutrality and academic "objectiveness". He was meticulous in facts, but sparing in his evaluation of Kreutzwald's work.

However, among the pre-war leading Estonian intellectuals, Suits was not alone in his tacit support of Kreutzwald. From the middle of the 1930s August Annist (1899–1972), who was to become a major figure in Estonian folklore studies, defended his doctoral dissertation on folkloric motifs in Kreutzwald's *Kalevipoeg* (1935) and published subsequently a number of monographs on the same subject. His life-long work on Kreutzwald's *Kalevipoeg* (Annist 2005), comprising

more than 900 pages, was published posthumously. Without any doubt, Suits and Annist, above all, secured and expanded in the pre-war Estonia Kreutzwald's canonical position as the founder of Estonian literature and the author of a major epic.

Kalevipoeg in Estonian Pre-War Literary Histories and School Textbooks

The literary histories published in Estonia in the early 20th century and in the Estonian Republic between the world wars cautiously avoided extreme views. Their authors were certainly not canon-founding personalities, but they had an important role in reflecting the predominating viewpoint of criticism. Thus Mihkel Kampmaa in his *Eesti kirjandusloo peajooned* ('Main Features of Estonian Literary History', 1912) dedicated nearly thirty pages to Kreutzwald (60–89). In the general framework of a positivist approach, with literary currents providing the contours for individual phenomena and stylistic devices occupying the descriptive foreground, Kampmaa admitted that Kreutzwald's folkloric material in creating *Kalevipoeg* was scarce and that there were some parts of the epic not having much to do with the main story. However, in his general opinion Kampmaa relied on what was already claimed by Reiman (including the quotation from Reiman's 1907 essay, cited above in the present article) and concluded on his part that "[n]o other book has exercised such a strong influence on the independence and development of our nation as *Kalevipoeg*." (Kampmann 1912: 89).

Kampmaa's historical overviews of Estonian literature in several volumes we reprinted a number of times during the pre-war Republic (1913, 1921, 1933). They constituted the backbone for school textbooks on literature and were by no means ignored in the later attempts to write literary histories. Even Tuglas, the main defying critic of Kreutzwald, grudgingly admitted in his *Lühike eesti kirjandushugu* ('A Short History of Estonian Literature') that "[e]ven though *Kalevipoeg* was not a traditional folkloric epic, it was

definitely a national epic. By creating it, Kreutzwald had risen to be among the greatest Estonians.” (1936: 43).

Preparing textbooks of Estonian literature for schools was a longer task. Kampmaa’s role was also important in compiling first commented anthologies of Estonian literature for schools (thus, *Kooli lugemiseraamat, I–II*. Tartu, 1905–1907, later developed into *Eesti lugemik* which in its final form included five volumes and underwent a great number of reprints in the pre-war Estonian republic). It is but natural that samples of Kreutzwald’s work were worthily represented in Kampmaa’s anthologies.

In the first textbook particularly meant for schools its author Karl Mihkla concluded at the end of an extensive chapter on Kreutzwald (117–161): “*Kalevipoeg* is a monumental work in our literature. It laid the basis for national-romantic literature and encouraged the gathering of folklore. Kreutzwald’s *Kalevipoeg* gave rise to our people’s national self-consciousness”, and quoting Gustav Suits (in the journal *Eesti Kirjandus*, 1911, pp. 453–458), added: “without *Kalevipoeg*’s witchcraft the national movement of Estonia could never have emerged with such a force” (Mihkla 1935: 152).

Canon maneuvers in unmaneuverable times. Kreutzwald’s *Kalevipoeg* in literary histories and school textbooks under the German occupation and the Soviet regime

Since Estonia lost its independence as a state, in 1940, its culture came to be firmly directed by a strongly tendentious ideology, which is natural under whatever totalitarianism. The wartime initial Soviet occupation (1940–1941) and the following German occupation (1941–1944) were too short to bring about any substantial changes. However, the evidence of censorship is the clearest marker that culture could no longer function under peacetime liberal conditions. Thus, in Bernard Sööt’s *Eesti kirjanduslugu gümnaasiumile. III. Viies klass*. Tallinn: Eesti Kirjastus, 1943, which also comprises a selection of foreign literature, two poems of Paul Verlaine (“Chanson d’Automne”, “Art Poétique”) were published without

mentioning their translator. (While Gustav Suits was mentioned, as the translator of Verlaine's poem "La Lune Blanche"). (pp. 151–152) The first two poems were translated by Johannes Semper, a key intellectual in the pre-war Estonian republic, a poet, novelist, essayist and translator, who in the first Soviet occupation sided with the left-wing and the communists.

The same practice of omitting the names of undesirable intellectuals was widely adopted in the Soviet period. One who above all suffered from it was Ants Oras, a major translator of English literature and critic who fled Estonia during the war. Thus in the 1946 edition of three translated classical tragedies of Shakespeare (*Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*) Oras's name, as the translator, was omitted. His name could not be found with his translations of the poems of Leconte de Lisle and Baudelaire as late as 1969, in an anthology of world poets, published by Tartu University (*XIX–XX sajandi väliskirjanikke. III*. 3rd Print. Tartu, 1969).

During the German occupation, older Estonian literature was treated in a textbook for secondary schools, *Eesti kirjanduslugu gümnaasiumile. I. Kolmas klass*. ('History of Estonian Literature. I. 3rd Form'), written by O. Parlo, J. Aavik and K. Mihkla. Although the authors of its particular chapters are not identified in the textbook, it can easily be recognized that the chapter on Kreutzwald was written by Johannes Aavik who already in the years of "Young Estonia" movement was the main ally of Tuglas in the latter's criticism of *Kalevipoeg*. The same accusations can be heard now: it is not a genuine folk-epic (Parlo, Aavik, Mihkla 1944: 105–106), the epic's composition is fragmentary, lacking unity (ib. 110), the songs are loosely connected (ib. 111), Kreutzwald's melancholy and subjectivity do not correspond to the genuine spirit of ancient folk-epics (ib. 112), it has a lot of stumbling in its language, style and metrics (ib. 114–116) and, finally, the epic is romantic in its taste and as such, full of a yearning for the past (ib. 120). It is almost humorous that among the few positive features of the epic, Aavik mentions that Kreutzwald warned Estonians against too light-mindedly migrating to Russia... (ib. 114).

The biased character of Aavik's criticism of *Kalevipoeg* is best of all revealed in a short history of Estonian literature published in 1954

in Stockholm by Karl Ristikivi, a major Estonian novelist who like many Estonian intellectuals, Aavik and Suits included, fled during the war to Sweden. Ristikivi writes in his *Eesti kirjanduse lugu* ('A History of Estonian Literature'), published in 1954 in Stockholm:

Scientists have found that it is a falsification of folksong. And literary critics have found that the falsification has not been made with a sufficient skill, that the work has metrical and aesthetic drawbacks. However, *Kalevipoeg*'s exceptional importance in our cultural history cannot be denied, as its role in elevating national self-conscience, and also the fact that even purely in the artistic sense it towers high over all the rest of its contemporary literature. [...] Kreutzwald's *Kalevipoeg* belongs to those works, whose importance of their very existence is by far greater than the profit one gains by reading them.

It was by no means difficult to adapt Kreutzwald's *Kalevipoeg* poetry to those works of the past that supported the new socialist canon of culture and literature glorified by the official ideology of the Soviet Union. Simple people's culture and folklore, as well as peoples' just fight for freedom in the world, against exploiters – the upper classes – were the main pillars on which official Soviet ideology was built up. As *Kalevipoeg* relied importantly on folklore and had as its leitmotif the dream of the awakening and liberation of the Estonian people, it responded perfectly to the conception of an ideal work of the past. Besides, the epic's pathos was indeed directed against the Germans who had introduced serfdom in Estonia and under whose rule Estonian peasants lived for many centuries. In the introductory song of *Kalevipoeg*, Kreutzwald makes an explicit bow to the tsarist government:

Such was old Estonia's lot
before the rise of Russian rule
the clement care of the eagle's
wing.

(*Kalevipoeg* 2007: 18)

I do not suppose at all that while stressing those features in *Kalevipoeg* Estonian literary scholars were seeking to flatter the official Soviet system. With a few exceptions, they rather knew that it was an almost unavoidable maneuver by which our fundamental authors could survive in hard unmaneuverable times. It was not necessary to speak in public about the deeper patriotic sentiment in *Kalevipoeg* or in Juhan Liiv's poetry, rejecting *any* slavery and foreign domination. It was understood by people anyway.

In the Soviet Estonia, the task of preparing a substantial multi-volume history of Estonian literature was delegated to a group of scholars of the Institute of Estonian Language and Literature, established as a section of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian S.S.R. As the process was slow, school textbooks on Estonian literature, often written by university professors, assumed the role of granting a continuation to the history of Estonian literature. There is no need to say that school textbooks circulated among the wider public, not only schoolchildren, copies were kept at home and consulted beyond their strictly pedagogical purpose. In parallel, anthologies of literary texts, destined to different school forms, were published. The virtual literary history was complemented by book editions which nearly always contained larger prefaces or introductory essays.

There were a number of new editions of *Kalevipoeg* in the Soviet period. August Annist, the best Estonian connoisseur of Kreutzwald's work, having remained after the war in Estonia, took part in the preparation of several of these editions. Thus, the most complete academically prepared edition of *Kalevipoeg*, with Annist's introduction, appeared in two volumes, in 1961–1963. The first Soviet era edition was in 1946 (with an introduction by Oskar Urgart), to be followed by the 1951 edition (introduced by Eduard Laugaste, a well-known folklorist) and the 1961 edition, for which Endel Nirk, a leading literary scholar, wrote an introduction. A richly illustrated edition (with drawings made in the 1930s by Kristjan Raud) came out in 1975, containing Annist's commentaries and Nirk's afterword. It is also noteworthy that in exile, *Kalevipoeg* was re-edited twice (1947 in Vadstena, Sweden, with Annist's introduction, and 1954 in Toronto).

For a present-day reader, the first after-war school textbooks sound quite humorous, as black-and-white ideological appreciations prevailed. The pre-war criticism by Tuglas and Aavik of *Kalevipoeg*, extended to the 1944 textbook by Aavik's negative appreciations, was now claimed to be an attack against the working people. (Vihalem 1952: 209) Other authors (Sögel, Taev 1954) assured their young readers that Kalevipoeg's battle in Kikerpära marsh (10th Tale) symbolized the fight of the people's hero against the enemies of the people (ib. 43), while the episode with Kalevipoeg bringing timber from Russia wading through the Lake Peipus meant symbolically a peaceful friendly cooperation between Estonians and Russians (ib.). One of the textbooks (Alekörs, Teder 1951) in which Adam Peterson's poem "Munamägi" is characterized, the reader is left with the impression that Alevipoeg (one of the companions and allies of Kalevipoeg) had come from Russia to help the Estonian hero (153–154): "from the East, dear Alev / comes to help the Estonian people" (ib. 153–154).

As for the final episode of the epic, in which the author announces Kalevipoeg's return one day to his country, to redeem his people, the authors of the textbook claim that this dream of Kreutzwald had become true after the establishment of Soviet power in Estonia and the liquidation of the exploiters' class (ib. 55). Older Estonian literature was taught nearly always in the first forms of the secondary school. The new element was that some of these manuals contained at the same time chapters on Estonian and Russian literature. Thus in the textbooks *Eesti ja vene kirjandus V klassile* ('Estonian and Russian Literature for the 5th Form') and *Eesti ja vene kirjandus* ('Estonian and Russian Literature'), extensive samples of *Kalevipoeg* were presented (to characterize the hero's attitude to work, people and enemies), in parallel with chapters on older Russian authors like Pushkin, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Chekhov, and even newer Soviet authors, like Gorki and Mayakovski.

Bulky school anthologies of Estonian literature have a special value. It is a general rule that in times of ideological pressure under totalitarian systems, the value of metatexts (commentaries, criticism, introductory treatments) is notably diminished. Thus, the significance of literary works (original texts) themselves grows in such

conditions, they can contradict metatexts and stimulate the reader, in opposition to the official interpretation, to find out hidden meanings and messages. Especially in the case of school anthologies, the choice itself of literary texts could often guide the reader and compensate for the deficiency of an official (written) interpretation presented in the manuals.

In the after-war school anthologies, Kreutzwald's *Kalevipoeg* was always worthily represented. Thus in *Emakeele lugemik VI klassile* ('Estonian Reader for 6th Form', Selmet 1948) samples from seven songs of the epic can be found (11–39). Also in the anthologies destined to the last forms of the secondary school (in those times, forms XVIII–X, or the secondary school), *Kalevipoeg*'s is a constant presence. Extensive excerpts from all twenty songs of the epic, on nearly seventy pages (128–195), were included in Karl Mihkla's textbook *Kirjanduslooline lugemik VIII klassile* ('Reader of Literary History', Mihkla 1948). Mihkla's thorough anthology had not only value for schools, but for a much wider public. In fact, the book is a wide and well intended selection of all older Estonian literature, since ancient folksongs and folktales. It is likely that Mihkla prepared his book relying extensively on his research activity before the war. In *Eesti kirjandus. Lugemik IX klassile* ('Estonian Literature. A Reader for 9th Form; Alekõrs, E. Sõgel, L. Vihalem 1957) samples from Kreutzwald's work occupy the main part of the book's volume (pp. 3–150, excerpts from *Kalevipoeg*, pp. 70–150).

Since the ideological atmosphere became more relaxed from the 1960s onwards, it was possible to discuss more openly the canon of Estonian literature of the past and include opinions and facts that were silenced during the harsh Stalinist years. The virtual literary history, importantly sustained by school textbooks, now secretly relying on the experience of the pre-war republic, now on the introductory essays of book editions, was substantially complemented by a real literary history, prepared in a solid academic fashion by a group of scholars of the Institute of Language and Literature of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR: *Eesti kirjanduse ajalugu* ('A History of Estonian Literature'). Its volumes treating contemporary literature remained tendentious, but its merit in gathering and providing fundamental knowledge about the canon of the past cannot

be denied. Kreutzwald's work was treated in a large chapter (pp. 60–127) of Volume 2 by the volume's editor, Endel Nirk, a doctor of philology and one of the most competent Estonian literary scholars during the Soviet period. Nirk provides a detailed account of the formation of Kreutzwald's epic, its different editions. He admits that "*Kalevipoeg*'s versification is by no means coherent, Kreutzwald's imitation generally is not capable of reaching the level of folk-poetry, also a number of incorrect linguistic turns have been used" (Nirk 1966: 94). However, Nirk does not fail to emphasize the epic's role in stirring national sentiment (ib. 87) and echoing people's fight against the forces of the evil (ib. 88–90). He mentions that *Kalevipoeg* was enthusiastically welcomed by the small Estonian intellectual elite in formation (Jakobson, Koidula, Hurt, Veske, ib. 95) and that the early German translation of Kreutzwald's epic favored its broader reception (ib. 96). To demonstrate the great importance attributed to Kreutzwald's work by the Soviet regime, Nirk makes stand forth the fact that Kreutzwald's name was conferred to the Museum of Literature and to the State Library (ib. 124). To contrast it with much poorer advances in the same sense in the pre-war republic, Nirk mentions that Kreutzwald's memorial museum was installed in Võru in a house that before the war was a simple inn (ib. 123).

Nirk was growingly more eloquent in the subsequent treatments of *Kalevipoeg* in his monographic overview, first published in English: *Estonian Literature* (Nirk 1970), of which an adaptation in Estonian appeared in 1983 (Nirk 1983). Thus he writes:

It was the first work which spoke openly of the nation's determination to win freedom. Its theme was the struggle of the people against slavery and oppression, and it proclaimed the patriotic idea of selfless devotion to the fatherland. The legendary age of *Kalevipoeg* was represented as a period of freedom and prosperity, sharply counterpoised to the succeeding centuries of tyranny, violence and suffering. (Nirk 1970: 73; trans. A. R. Hone)

In his epic *Kalevipoeg* Kreutzwald convincingly demonstrated the efficiency of his conception of literature and revealed the rich possibilities latent in the free adaptation and creative elaboration of authentic folklore. He made full use of the stylistic devices of folk

poetry, and his text is richly interspersed with genuine folk songs and fragments of folk songs.” (Ib. 73–74; trans. A. R. Hone)

This monumental poem of the heroic past [...] was to rouse the national consciousness, as yet dormant, of the masses of the people, and at the same time to demonstrate to the world the rich poetic heritage of Estonian folklore. (Ib. 71; trans. A. R. Hone)

The academic and school literary history overlapped importantly, as academicians and university professors extensively contributed to the writing of school textbooks. Since the start of the 1980s until the new political liberation of Estonia, the schoolbooks of which annually reprints were made, continued to be the main support of a national literary history. The classical part of its canon was kept unchanged, though some of the earlier simplifications were skipped and some new bolder accents, in the national-ideological sense, were introduced. Thus in *Eesti kirjandus. IX klassile*. (‘Estonian Literature. 9th Form’, Puhvel 1982) the editor in his interpretation of *Kalevipoeg* omits the claim of the epic’s anti-religious stand and its spirit of friendship with Russian tribes, still present in the 16th reprint of an earlier prepared textbook (Mihkla, Tedre 1980: 84–85). Puhvel is also convinced of *Kalevipoeg*’s belonging to the greater canon of world literature (Puhvel 1982: 77). Puhvel’s interpretations of *Kalevipoeg* were subsequently carried on by reprints of the textbook until the very eve of the new political independence of Estonia (Puhvel 1990).

The Latest Developments around the Canon

Estonia’s new political independence conditioned an urgent need to reevaluate national history as well as the canon of national literature. Since the early years of the 1990s, there have been significant changes. They concern above all literature created in Estonia itself and in exile after the tragic events of WWII. The effort to summarize the main features of all Estonian literature since its beginnings till our days in *Eesti kirjanduslugu* (‘A History of Estonian Literature’, Annus *et alii* 2001) should be duly appreciated, as it indeed managed

to include all what had been forbidden, omitted, neglected or mistreated in the Soviet period (exile literature, a number of pre-war writers who were considered decadent or reactionary by the Soviet regime). The volume comprising 700 pages gathers a variety of newer views in the reception of literature and also provides rich and valuable visual material.

However, a closer look at the volume would reveal an imbalance in the structure, as well as serious omissions. Especially against the background of its extensive treatment of several exile writers as well as of a number of younger authors, born in the 1960s and after, it looks almost grotesque that Kreutzwald's *Kalevipoeg* has deserved only a brief mention on a couple of pages (68–70). In such an imbalance I do not suspect any malicious intent. The reason for the book's insufficiency should be rather sought in the fact that the need to write a new literary history caught Estonia's literary academy at an utterly unfavourable moment: with the new republic, the former Institute of Language and Literature was reformed, the task of literary research being attributed to the Under-Tuglas Centre of literature, comprised mainly of younger scholars. The older elite of literary researchers had either passed away or had exhausted their writing energy. Estonian literature at Tartu University was left for a number of years without a chair.

Under obvious pressure of time, also new school textbooks were prepared. Compared with the above mentioned *Eesti kirjanduslugu*, the treatment of *Kalevipoeg* (pp. 56–58) in *Vanem eesti kirjandus* ('Older Estonian Literature', chapter authors unidentified; Epner *et alii* 2005) is somewhat worthier, but it is still restricted just to a summary of the epic's main episodes. As for *Kalevipoeg*'s importance, the textbook at least contains a quotation from an article by Antoine Chavlin, the French translator of *Kalevipoeg* (Gallimard, 2004): "Those who in France are interested in Estonia, can now read *Kalevipoeg* as a cultural document, the main pillar of Estonian literature and a substantial element in Estonian identity." (Epner *et alii* 2005: 77, originally published in Tamm 2004: 1723).

An effort to renovate traditional treatments and structure of Estonian school textbooks was undertaken in the 1990s by Märt Henno, a younger scholar, specialized in didactical writing. In his

Väike eesti kirjanduslugu. ('A Brief History of Estonian Literature' Hennoste 1997) he has included in parallel with samples of Kreutzwald's *Kalevipoeg*, their stylistically "corrected" version made by J. Aavik (Hennoste 1997: 56–57). In the vein of Aavik's criticism of *Kalevipoeg*, there is also a hint at the insufficiency of Kreutzwald's versification and poetic language (ib. 55).² In his *Eesti kirjandus tekstides* ('Estonian Literature in Texts', Hennoste 1996) Hennoste presents Kreutzwald's poetry only by samples of lyrical poems and Kreutzwald's foreword to the first unpublished version of *Kalevipoeg* (ib. 33–34).

Conclusion

To sum up, the most recent stage in the Estonian literary histories as well as in the canon reveals above all confusion and hesitation. Postmodern theories have rushed in. As they have been envisaged from the "centres", their adaptability to the "periphery", with its completely different cultural and historical situation, is dubious. In a small country, with relatively few capable literary scholars active in the field, besides, everybody with his / her passion and fashion (autobiography, postcolonial theories, narratology and, in any case, theory prevailing over history) there seems to be little hope that in the coming decades a new fundamental history of literature could be published in Estonia. In all probability, the school "virtual" literary history, which strongly supported the canon until the late 1880s, will likewise lose some of its coherence. The trend to fragmentation and de-nucleation is a general feature. The recent voluminous histories of European cultures prepared under the aegis of the ICLA (like for instance the multi-volume *History of the Literary Cultures of East-*

² Among the the new editions of *Kalevipoeg* after Estonia's regained independence, there is one by Avita, apparently destined to schools (1997), which along with treatments of the epic by Annist and Nirk, also includes Tuglas's early essay on Kreutzwald's work. The intention is apparently to balance the view which as regards the epic has prevailed in the literary histories written in the Soviet period.

Central Europe. I–III. Eds. M. Cornis-Pope and J. Neubauer, Amsterdam-Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2004, 2006, 2007) contain valuable contributions to the understanding of various aspects of European literary history, but the choice of essays is still far from offering a comprehensive coverage of the broad topic. Individual scholars participating in these projects have nearly all their limitations, their knowledge being restricted to the area of two or, more exceptionally, three languages. It is still very far from producing an authentically comparative literary history.

In a small cultural area, where literature is being created in a minority language, the access of international scholars is especially restricted, while an exclusively national effort from the “inside” generally fails to grasp the wider contexts of a phenomenon. Yet as our story has tried to prove, there is always room for “symbiotic personalities”, as I would call them (i.e. philosophically minded scholars and writers, capable of moving between different language areas), to complement and rethink literary histories in their essays and monographs, as well as to shake the existing canons.³ As ever more women enter the field of literary creation and scholarship, a radical turn in reevaluating literary canons seems to be in the air, aimed to form a symbiotic view of literature, in which a new and more balanced relationship is established between centres and peripheries, the “self” and the “other”. It is very likely that we are positioned at the agonic end of male and centre dominated histories and canons of literature. As for *Kalevipoeg*, I am deeply convinced that in the new turn I am hinting at, its significance will not diminish, but on the contrary, will be ever more completely revealed.

³ In this context, a valuable pioneering effort has recently been made by Cornelius Hasselblatt, a German literary scholar of Baltic-German descent, specializing in Estonian language and culture (see Hasselblatt 2006).

References

- Alekõrs, R. and J. Teder. 1951. *Eesti kirjandus IX klassile*. Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus.
- Alekõrs, R., Sõgel, E. and L. Vihalem. 1957. *Eesti kirjandus. Lugemik IX klassile*. Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus.
- Annist, A. 2005. *Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwaldi „Kalevipoeg”*. Ülo Tedre (ed.). Tallinn: Eesti Keele Sihtasutus.
- Annus, E., Epner, L., Järv, A., Olesk, S., Süvalep, E. and M. Velsker. 2001. *Eesti kirjanduslugu*. Tallinn: Koolibri.
- Eesti kirjanduse ajalugu. II. XIX sajandi II pool*. 1966. Toim. E. Nirk. Tallinn: Eesti Raamat.
- Epner, L., Metste, K. and S. Olesk. 2005. *Vanem eesti kirjandus. Gümnaasiumi õpik*. Tallinn: Koolibri.
- Hasselblatt, C. *Geschichte der estnischen Literatur*. Berlin. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006.
- Hennoste, M. 1996a. *Väike eesti kirjanduslugu. IX klassi õpik-lugemik*. Tallinn: Koolibri.
- Hennoste, M. 1996b. *Eesti kirjandus tekstides. Lugemik keskkoolile. I osa*. Tallinn: Avita.
- Herman, K. A. 1898. *Eesti kirjanduse ajalugu esimesest algusest meie ajani*. Jurjev, 386–403.
- Kalevipoeg. An Ancient Estonian Tale*. 2007. Compiled by Fr. R. Kreutzwald, trans. J. Kurman. Üle Õla.
- Kampmann, M. 1912. *Eesti kirjandusloo peajooned*. Tallinn: August Buschi Kirjastus.
- Luiga, J. 1995 [1917]. Noor-Suomi-Eesti. – *Mäss ja meelegaigus*. Tartu: Ilmamaa, 274–318.
- Metste, K. and M. Laak. 2003. *Kreutzwald. Missioon. Tegelikkus*. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum.
- Mihkla, K. 1935 [1932]. *Eesti kirjanduse ülevaade. I. Tööraamat gümnaasiumi III klassile*. Tartu: Noor-Eesti.
- Mihkla, K. 1948. *Kirjanduslooline lugemik VIII klassile*. Tallinn: Riiklik Kirjastus „Pedagoogiline Kirjandus”.
- Mihkla, K. and Ü. Tedre 1980. *Eesti kirjandus. IX klassile*. 16. trükk, Tallinn: Valgus.
- Nirk, E. 1966. Kreutzwald. – *Eesti kirjanduse ajalugu. 2. XIX sajandi teine pool*. Endel Nirk (ed.). Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 60–127.
- Nirk, E. 1970. *Estonian Literature*. Trans. V. Hain, A. R. Hone, O. Mutt. Tallinn: Eesti Raamat.

- Nirk, E. 1983. *Eesti kirjandus*. Tallinn: Perioodika.
- Parlo, O, Aavik, J. and K. Mihkla 1944. *Eesti kirjanduslugu gümnaasiumile. I. Kolmas klass*. Tallinn: Eesti Kirjastus.
- Puhvel, H. 1982. *Eesti kirjandus. IX klassile*. Tallinn: Valgus.
- Puhvel, H. 1990. *Eesti kirjandus. X klassile*. 3. Trükk. Tallinn: Valgus.
- Reimann, V. 2008. Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald. – *Mis meist saab?* Tartu: Ilmamaa, 54–91.
- Ristikivi, K. 1954. *Eesti kirjanduse lugu*. Stockholm: Tõrvik.
- Selmet, A. 1948. *Emakeele lugemik VI klassile*. Tallinn: Riiklik Kirjastus „Pedagoogiline Kirjandus”.
- Selmet, A. 1954. *Eesti ja vene kirjandus V klassile*. Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1954.
- Selmet, A. 1954a. *Eesti ja vene kirjandus*. Tln: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus.
- Sõgel, E. and K. Taev. 1954. *Eesti kirjandus. VII klassile*. Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus, 1954.
- Sööt, B. 1943. *Eesti kirjanduslugu gümnaasiumile. III. Viies klass*. Tallinn: Eesti Kirjastus.
- Talvet, J. 2009. Constructing a Mythical Future City for a Symbiotic Nation from the European “Periphery”: Fr. R. Kreutzwald’s Epic *Kalevipoeg*. – *Interlitteraria*, 14, Vol. I, 84–103.
- Tamm, M. 2004. Eesti kirjandus Pariisist vaadatuna. Usutlus Antoine Chalviniga. – *Looming*, 11.
- Tuglas, F. *Lühike eesti kirjanduslugu*. Tartu: Eesti Kirjanduse Selts, 1936.
- Vihalem, L. 1952. *Eesti kirjandus. VIII klassile*. Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus.